

June 7, 1999

**PROPOSAL FOR WATER MANAGEMENT
PILOT PROJECT TO BENEFIT RIPARIAN VEGETATION
ALONG THE SAN JOAQUIN RIVER**

Introduction

This pilot project has been developed by the Natural Resources Defense Council, the Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations, and the Friant Water Users Authority as a result of our cooperative efforts related to the San Joaquin River Riparian Habitat Restoration Program. It involves a short-term water exchange designed to provide immediate environmental benefits via an alternative water management scenario for part of the Friant Division of the Central Valley Project that provides improvements to the riparian environment along the San Joaquin River while also fully meeting the water needs of the existing contractors. The pilot project proposes a designed release of flows from Friant Dam to the Mendota Pool from mid-June through October 1999 that is above the minimum releases ordinarily necessary to meet the requirements of water rights settlement contracts between Friant Dam and Gravelly Ford. However, the proposed releases are within the range of flows that occurred during the past two years as a result of flood operations.

The primary purpose of the augmented flows is to promote dispersal and germination of seed from native riparian trees and survival of young seedlings. Such riparian habitat restoration has strong support in the work of CALFED, the San Joaquin River Management Program (SJRMP), and other consensus efforts. Central to the pilot project is the commitment to create no adverse impacts on any water users. This is accomplished through a series of water exchanges and the provision of sufficient funds to provide for wheeling, pumping and, where necessary, purchase of replacement water. In general, one or more of the Friant Division irrigation districts will permit some of their 1999 water supply from Millerton Reservoir to be released down the San Joaquin River for the pilot project. The water would flow to the Mendota Pool and be used by the San Joaquin River Exchange Contractors. None of the pilot project water would flow past Mendota Dam. An equivalent amount of water (i.e. equal to that received at Mendota Pool) that the Exchange Contractors would normally receive from the Delta Mendota Canal would be wheeled via the Federal San Luis CVP facilities and the State Water Project to the Cross Valley Canal (CVC) and subsequently returned to the Friant service area. A fund would be created to accomplish a water purchase during the project period to make up for any of the water losses that would occur through execution of this program. The anticipated water purchase would be from existing rights to Delta exports and therefore,

no new Delta pumping would be created. The Bureau of Reclamation would provide funding for this pilot project.

Description of the Pilot Project

The pilot project consists of the following major components:

1. Dispersal and germination of native riparian tree seeds via flow augmentation (using one of three alternative flow regimes).
2. Provision of water to ensure "no-net loss" through agreements for wheeling and exchange of water and the funding of water purchases.
3. Monitoring of riparian vegetation and physical processes.
4. Environmental Compliance

These are each described below:

1. Dispersal and germination of native riparian tree seeds via flow augmentation. The dispersal and germination of native tree seeds via flow augmentation is described in detail in Appendix A to this proposal. Cottonwood and willow trees are the targeted species for this project. Three flow options at Gravelly Ford are considered. Each option runs from June 1 through October 30 with gradually declining flows. (Further study indicates that a June 14-September 30 period may be sufficient.) The options are:
 - Gradual Flow Recession from 600 cfs-Schedule A (43,050 acre-feet)
 - Less Gradual Flow Recession from 600 cfs-Schedule B (31,350 acre-feet) and
 - Gradual Flow Recession from 300 cfs-Schedule C (21,600 acre-feet)

The environmentally preferred alternative is Schedule A, although it is recognized that the total quantity of additional Friant releases will be less than 43,050 due to the existing base flows during the study period. Graphically, these flow schedules are in figure 2. The initiation of the flow augmentation should begin soon after the native trees begin dispersing their seeds. As of May 26, 1999, seeds had not started to disperse in the River section targeted by the pilot project. Current estimates are for a mid-June starting time.

2. Provision of augmentation flows. The ability to provide the flow augmentation for this project (at whatever level) under the commitment of creating no adverse impacts to water users requires the development of a program to release a district(s) water at Friant and return it to that district(s). This can be accomplished through a series of agreements that provide for wheeling, exchanges, and purchase of water. The return of water to achieve the "no-net loss" provision can occur over a longer period of time than the flow augmentation portion of the pilot project, provided (1) a firm commitment is made to return that water with which the Friant district(s) providing

that water for flow augmentation are comfortable and (2) the exchanged water and the funds for purchase of supplemental replacement water are all provided during the district(s)' 1999 water run (when it can be used), and the purchased water is delivered to the Friant service area by February 29, 2000. The following outlines the process to implement the provision of replacement water:

- Friant district(s) voluntarily provide water for release by the Bureau at Friant Dam for the flow augmentation under "no-net loss" proviso
- Exchange Contractors continue to receive their water from the Mendota Pool
- FPA power interference costs (if any) are recognized
- Agreement with SLDMWA for O&M cost allocation for wheeling Exchange Contractors supply to San Luis Canal not Mendota Pool. This includes the extra costs (i.e. beyond the costs already to be paid by FWUA for delivery of Exchange Water to Mendota Pool via DMC):

Federal project wheeling
Federal storage
Dos Amigos pumping

- Agreement with DWR for wheeling in Aqueduct
 - Agreement with CVC users for wheeling in the CVC
 - Friant pump-back operation (if any)
 - Make up water purchase by USBR
3. Monitoring of vegetation and physical processes. Appendix A contains detailed recommendations for the monitoring program. It is important that baseline conditions are established prior to initiating the flow augmentation. Repeated field vegetation sampling should be accomplished once a month from June through November of 1999. At the conclusion of the pilot project a report will be prepared.
 4. Environmental compliance. The USBR will need to ensure compliance with NEPA, ESA and any other applicable federal statute or regulation. Any costs of CEQA compliance (if any) by participating local agencies would be reimbursed by the project. Those costs are not anticipated to be material.

The total estimated cost of the pilot project is approximately \$2.5 million.

Attachments: Figure 1--Map
Figure 2--Flow Schedules
Appendix A--Flow Augmentation to benefit Riparian Vegetation